OUR DARK YEAR

Our year in Italy was the darkest year in our lives. Soon after our arrival in Rome, Emma felt pain while visiting the Vatican galleries. The next morning she could not get up. The physician diagnosed an acute form of peritonitis and urged an immediate operation. One of the best surgeons in Italy performed the operation, which lasted three hours but was not wholly successful. Emma had to undergo several more operations before the infection was stopped.

For six months she hovered between life and death, but not once did she complain to the doctors and nurses or to me. I spent the whole day from ten to six at the hospital, leaving only for conferences at the legation. Each morning Emma greeted me cheerfully saying, "I feel fine today," even when she lay motionless, unable to turn her head on the pillow. The chief surgeon told me that in all his long practice he had never had a patient with such strength of will. He believed that medical science would have been helpless in Emma's case except for her courage and unyielding will to live.

The personnel of the clinic consisted largely of nuns. The elderly, important-looking Mother Superior was the directress of the hospital. The nuns did their jobs diligently, but they were reserved and cool in their attitudes toward the patients, always maintaining a certain distance. Their indifference ended, however, at the door of Emma's room. She was surrounded by exceptional attention.

Most devoted to her was a nurse named Giuseppina. When she was preparing Emma for the first operation, Emma noticed a small bandage on her finger. Afterward, when Emma opened her eyes, still under the effects of ether, she saw Giuseppina caring for her and asked softly, "How is your finger? Does it hurt?"

The girl continued to work, but her hands trembled and another nurse took her place. A moment later I saw her standing at a window in the hall. She turned toward me, in tears, and whispered:

"If this lady does not recover, there is no God!"

The nuns used Emma as an example to patients who went to pieces from self-pity and fear, and many came to her bedside to talk about their personal affairs. Some were simple country girls, others came from middle-class surroundings and were more sophisticated; only a few could speak a little French. Talking with them, Emma picked up enough Italian for everyday conversation. Gradually she learned to read and speak Italian fluently, and this turned out to be of substantial help to both of us later in our work in the field of world economics.

Before the last operation, the Mother Superior came to Emma